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JEWISH ESSAYS AND HOMILETICAL LITERATURE

Essays. By JOSEPH STRAUSS, Ph.D., M.A. London: The
WALTER SCOTT PUBLISHING COMPANY. pp. 264.

What is Judaism? A Survey of Jewish Life, Thought, and
Achievement. By ABRAM S. ISAACS, Ph.D., Professor of
Semitics, New York University. New York: G. P. PUTNAM'S
SONS, 1912. pp. x+206.

A series of well-written essays on Jewish themes by Jewish writers is always a desideratum. Such are furnished in two small volumes, the one by Joseph Strauss entitled *Essays*, and the other by Abram S. Isaacs entitled *What is Judaism?*

The author of the first of these little books is an English rabbi, born and educated in Germany. His essays are largely of a biographical nature, and are objective statements, educational and informing in character. The choice of subjects shows the popular and yet cultural purpose of the author: Hillel, Spinoza, Mendelssohn, Kant, Goethe's Mother, Heine, Woman's Position in Ancient and Modern Jewry and Zionism exhausts the category. The writer's style is lucid; his statements beautifully simple, and his information accurate. He does not aim at original research work, but to present the main facts already ascertained in concrete form. In his presentation of Hillel he does not hesitate to explain and illustrate his seven hermeneutical rules, as well as giving the anecdotes illustrating his personality and teaching.

So in the essay on Spinoza, in the clear, brief and simple statement of his life, he yet finds opportunity to explain some of the fundamental principles of his philosophy and ethics. So far as Spinoza's attitude towards Judaism and his relations towards the Jewish community is concerned, the explanation

afforded is decidedly favourable to the philosopher, although he declares: 'One cannot, however, acquit him of a certain degree of animosity which he showed therein (the Theological-Political Treatise) against Judaism, and even led him to an incorrect interpretation of a few passages of the Hebrew Bible.' The author's opinion of woman's position in Jewry may be understood from his own summing up: 'It will command the approval and admiration even of our modern suffragettes.' This he illustrates in various ways, e. g. in Marriage, Polygamy, Divorce, Family, Education, Society, Public Life, Learning, and Woman's Rights. Altogether the book is one to be read with pleasure and profit by the general educated reader.

Doctor Abram S. Isaacs is well known as rabbi, teacher, and author. He has written a number of Jewish books of a popular nature. This collection of articles, written at various times and for a number of periodicals, have yet a certain unity that justifies their assembly in this volume under a common title and description: 'A Survey of Jewish Life, Thought, and Achievement. The subjects that he selects are those which are current in these days, although there is something repellent to the faithful in such interrogations as 'What is Judaism?' 'Has Judaism a Future?' 'Is Judaism necessary to-day?' 'What makes the Jew?' These, however, are not the only themes. The author discusses such subjects as 'The Jew and the Currents of his Age', 'Jewish History', 'Jewish Literature', 'The Talmud in History', 'The Cabbala', 'The Story of the Synagogue'. His style is simple and pleasing, and his message directed to the intelligent but uninformed reader. He hopes to overcome ignorance and distraction by 'a clear and forceful exposition from the Jewish point of view, which, while preserving a fair and sober estimate, shall tell dispassionately and convincingly what is to be said without heat or prejudice'.

Doctor Isaacs is dispassionate, but not convincing. His views are hazy, and his easy-going liberalism lacks fire and force. We lose ourselves in the desire to placate. There is, however, much useful information on Jewish topics contained in the book.

Die Seele Israels : Zur Psychologie des Diasporajudentums. Von Dr. DANIEL PASMANIK. JÜDISCHER VERLAG, Köln und Leipzig, 1911. pp. xvi + 111.

If simply regarded for its brilliant style, the Zionist treatise of Doctor Daniel Pasmanik, entitled *Die Seele Israels : Zur Psychologie des Diasporajudentums*, would be well worthy of attention. It is a remarkable illustration of sustained and forceful statement throughout its 111 pages. The undertaking is to analyse the spiritual condition of Israel in the Diaspora and to show the absence, the necessary absence, of all original productive achievement during this extended interval.

The argument runs somewhat as follows : With the loss of national territory, the basis of development was lost. All the forces were at first directed towards preserving the national soul. The Jews became a people of hope, with past and a future, but no present.

The sheer unyieldingness that the Jew developed in the sphere of ideals and spiritual values was a marked feature of the era, justified by his past achievements, and characteristic of his radical nature. The author properly observes that it is not even necessary to assume that all of ancient Israel's treasures were absolutely original and indigenous ; it is enough that the Jews grasped them, incorporated them into their lives, and breathed a living spirit into them, for it is only the living that counts in life.

He then develops his theory of the correlation of *Werthe* (spiritual values or possessions) and *Würde* (dignity, honour). In the early centuries the Jew maintained the *Werthe* even at the total sacrifice of the *Würde*. His existence was a wretched one, dependent upon the grace of external influences, but always maintaining the hope of eventual deliverance that became more and more divorced from his own active agency in securing that end. His thesis is that this resulted in sterility. Nothing original could be produced. The Jews became a race of middlemen, purveyors of the productions of other races ; their own activity confined to some modification of foreign productions

or the writing of commentaries. He would deny originality even to the Talmud outside of the Mishnah that was native to Palestine. In the Spanish period he finds nothing reflecting Jewish development outside of the poems of Gabirol, that long for a restoration and the lyric greatness of Judah Halevi, the great advocate of Israel's national existence. Of Maimonides he disposes with a slurring allusion to his apology for enforced conversion. So he describes the growing deterioration into mysticism the result of the contradiction between unyielding insistence on the eternal ideals on the one side and the servile adaptation to foreign life on the other. Dignity was lost, but the spiritual values remained. These consisted of the Messianic idea of a future kingdom of God that possessed as essential features a holy people and a holy land. The period of the Kabbala he describes as one of ecstasy without *Werthe* or *Würde*. The emancipation and the breakdown of the Ghetto is identified with the sacrifice of *Werthe* for *Würde*. Spinoza's work was not Jewish, and Mendelssohn unwittingly contributed towards the dissolution of the Jewish spirit. This destruction of Jewish unity, the denial of Jewish national identity, was comparable to the destruction of the Temple. The disillusionment that came with Antisemitism only disclosed the springs of Jewish life that had always existed, and must bring about the rehabilitation of the Jewish nation, combining *Werthe* and *Würde*, and restoring its power of originality, its creativeness and development. This would come not through assimilation, nor nationalism, but through Zionism. The groundwork had been begun, the superstructure of the Temple was reserved for later generations. It remained for the 'élite', the true leaders of the people, to give the initiative.

The work it will be seen is propagandist in its nature, and is a Zionist analysis of Jewish history and character. Despite its derogatory views of Jewish achievement, it is marked by depth of thought and perspicacity and largeness of vision. The treatise has been translated into Hebrew and Russian. Following in the spirit of Achad Ha'am, it is another evidence of the spirit and force that Zionism has summoned into its service.

David Einhorn. Memorial volume. Selected Sermons and Addresses, edited by KAUFMANN KOHLER. A Biographical Essay by KAUFMANN KOHLER. A Memorial Oration by EMIL G. HIRSCH. Limited edition. New York: BLOCH PUBLISHING COMPANY, 1911. pp. viii + 482.

A collection of German sermons of Doctor David Einhorn in a memorial volume on his hundredth birthday has enriched our homiletic literature. Einhorn's career covered the heart of the nineteenth century, and he was thoroughly characteristic of the German reform rabbi of that period. He came to his task well equipped with both Jewish and secular knowledge, and his sermons, though not pedantic, show a grasp of the subjects of which he treats. His sermons cover his career whilst in Europe, in Schwerin and Pesth; as well as in America: Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Einhorn is the controversialist in the pulpit. His sermons teem with polemics, in form as well as in content. His thought is trenchant, sometimes sarcastic and witty, never pedantic, and rarely dull. He often employs allegorical interpretation, seldom tells a story or paints a picture. His style and language is simple and direct. His treatment clear and logical and his illustrations apt. Both in the subjects chosen and in his manner of dealing with them, Einhorn fully reveals the issues of his day. What he himself thinks of the function of the Jewish sermon may be gleaned from his own statement as follows: 'But the sermon also requires a fundamental reform, if it is to quite fulfil its high purpose. It must not consist in hollow "fine talk" and content itself with glittering adornment; it may not find its triumph in sentimental emotions and tearful eyes; it would then only blind instead of enlightening, inflame the imagination instead of moving the heart. The people hunger and thirst for instruction. With tear drops, however, we cannot assuage thirst, and with golden froth cannot still hunger. The people must and will have explanation of the great burning religious questions of the present day; with little speech artifices, however, these questions are only evaded, and an unworthy game of hide and seek is played that not only sets no

dam to the religious indifference that has set in amongst us, but gives it the greatest impetus. The Jewish sermon has the duty to lift the pearls of thought out of the deep mine of a four-thousand-year past to enable the congregation to cast a glance into the immeasurable treasury of ideas of the Bible and Talmud and the Midrashim, to show it the proud spiritual tower at which Israel even with wounded limbs has untiringly been employed for the welfare of mankind, and to show at the same time by how much the structure rises upwards the more it emerges out of the national limitations and recognizes its world-wide mission; how its incomparable history became the wine-press in which the shattering blows and the feet of the enemy led to an ever-increasing purifying and cleansing of the law and doctrine from its petrifying lees; how the forms of Judaism have been subject to change not only since to-day and yesterday but from antiquity according to the requirement of every age, but that its divine substance in no wise suffered loss by these changes, but on the contrary developed ever more gloriously; and how therefore the true reform consists not in tearing down but in extending and building on; not in rendering waste but in freeing the vineyard of stones. It must not be thought that the sermon may present the materials of instruction bare and dry; called to impress the spirit and the feelings, it must endeavour to combine the gentle and attractive with the earnest and the strong; the more precipitous the ascent up which it would lead the congregation the more is it bound to strew it with flowers; but these flower-bands must serve only to climb to the fertile mountain-tops of the divine law, and from this lofty standpoint to nurture the noble vintage of a God-pervaded life.'

The collection of sermons here given is divided into three groups: Inaugural and Farewell sermons; Addresses on National Memorial days and extraordinary occasions; Holiday and Sabbath discourses.

His attitude on religious and political questions is that of the Jewish assimilationist. Judaism must be changed to meet the conditions of the age and environment. Form and substance

alike must be altered. All nationalist elements must be removed: no return to Palestine, no rehabilitated service or organic existence. Yet he is not entirely consistent; for he believes in Israel as a priest people, opposes mixed marriages, and would preserve the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week. Though he would banish prayers in Hebrew, he declares German absolutely essential here in America. Germany is the land of culture in which Reform Judaism was born. 'Take away from it', he says, 'the German spirit, or what is the same thing—the German language—and you have torn away from it the mother-soil, and it must wither away, the lovely flower. The English sermon can have for its mission nothing else than to utilize the treasures of the German spirit and German literature for our religious life and therewith to enrich it. In a word: where the German sermon is banned, there the reform of Judaism is nothing more than a brilliant gloss, a decorated doll, without heart, without soul, which the proudest temples and the most splendid choirs cannot succeed in infusing with life.' Not the least remarkable feature of this striking statement is its close approximation to the truth.

The style and content of the Jewish sermon have changed somewhat since Einhorn's days, and his religious position is of interest, mainly to the student of Jewish history.

The Discipline of Sorrow and Other Papers. By S. ALFRED ADLER, Late Minister of the Hammersmith Synagogue. London: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, Ltd., 1911. pp. vii + 150.

The Discipline of Sorrow is a little volume of sermons and writings of S. Alfred Adler, the son of the late Chief-Rabbi of England, Doctor Hermann Adler. The son himself preceded his father into eternity, and this collection is in the nature of a memorial wreath, formed of the flowers of his own thought. There are three sermons; five religious causeries on various

Jewish holidays; one on the death of Herzl; and four travel sketches.

The sermons are lyric productions of a young man of high ideals who comes to the pulpit with Jewish sentiment and sympathy and a wide reading of English literature and especially poetry. His nature is deeply religious, and his words breathe the faith which inspired them. They are perhaps none the less helpful because the work of a young idealist, whom the rough contact with life has not shorn of his native high spirit and hope. He is not robust, and his writings indicate the gentleness of suffering. The sermon that gives the volume its name tells of the ennobling influence of pain endured with faith. His concept of 'the Duties of a Jewish Minister', another sermon, is that of a man inspired by the sincerity and conviction, devoted to the service of God, and earnest in teaching by precept and example the truth and beauty of a religious character. In his 'Smoke in the Flame', he deplores the invasion of commercialism into the management of a congregation. Thus his efforts in this direction are of a general elevating and edifying nature, but there is little that is definite and constructive.

In his holiday reflections he sounds the central themes of the day, and thus furnishes appropriate reading for such an occasion to those devoutly disposed.

His travel sketches are marked by fine and poetic perception, and his impressions of places and characters are presented with much vividness and force.

CHARLES I. HOFFMAN.

Newark, N. J.